THE GRENVILLE SENTINEL

Grenville County Historical Society **Facebook: https://shorturl.at/gixAO**
500 Railway Avenue, Box 982 **Email: gchs@truespeed.ca**
Prescott, ON, K0E 1T0 **Telephone: (613) 925-0489**
Website: www.grenvillecountyarchives.ca

Mar/Apr 2025 **ISSN 0715-3783** **No. 330**

Annual General Meeting Our Annual General Meeting was held at 500 Railway Avenue at our headquarters on March 5, 2025. President, Jane Ramsay, welcomed everyone present. We had a good turnout with Annual Reports given by each of the chairs of the committees. Fraser Laschinger told of recently deceased Valerie Schulz's contributions to our society and to many other groups in the area. Gini Leonard was thanked by Jane Ramsay for her many years of service on her retirement from our board and Jane welcomed Lynne Chagnon to our Board of Directors as she takes on the position of Membership Chair on Gini's retirement.

John Wilson has been digitizing some of our old slides and glass negatives with much success. He was able to easily colourize a photo or switch it back to the original black and white image. We watched many of the photos on a screen and we were all quite amazed at some of the photos, such as the demolition of the old Town Hall and Market Building, among others in that collection,. The meeting was followed by refreshments and good conversation was enjoyed by all.

Model Train & Toy Show

On April 12/25 at the Leo Boivin Community Centre, 444 Prince Street, Prescott, the 2nd Annual Model Train and Toy Show took place with a great crowd of about 1000 people counting the 932 paid attendees, plus children,vendors, exhibitors, and volunteers. GCHS's booth was manned by Jane Ramsay, David Graham, John Wilson, Lynne Chagnon, and Bonnie Gaylord. Jane and John did a great job of creating our display and setting up our tables; the display was well-received with many stopping to watch the slide show of railway photos we have in our collection. John's grandfather was a station master at the CN Station in Maitland and he brought an oil can used by his grandfather at the old Maitland railway station.

Ron Lipsett, Jane's husband, made this model of the old Grand Trunk Railway Station. He did a beautiful job on it and has donated it to us for use in future displays. Thanks Ron for all your hard work.

The Way It Was – Schooling with the Hickory Stick

A feature by Allan Reid, World War 1 veteran (1900 – 1970) and former longtime reporter for the Prescott Journal.

Reading, Riting and 'Rithmetic.

"Schoolhouses", declared Gene Stratten Porter in the delightful novel, "Laddie", are made wrong. If they must be, they should be built in a woods pasture beside a stream, where you could wade, swim and be comfortable in the summer, and slide and skate in the winter. The windows should be cut to the floor, and stand wide open, so the birds and butterflies could pass through. You ought to learn your geography by climbing a hill, walking through a valley, wading creeks, making islands in them, and promontories, capes and peninsulas along the bank. You should do your arithmetic sitting under trees adding hickory nuts, subtracting walnuts, multiplying butternuts and dividing hazelnuts. You could use apples for fractions, and tin cups for liquid measure. You could spell everything in sight, and this would teach you the words that are really used in the world.

"If you simply can't have school that way, then you should be shut in black cells, deep under the ground, where you couldn't see, or hear a sound, and then, if they'd give you a candle, and Miss Amelia (school mistress character from "Laddie"), and her right hand man, Mister Ruler, why, you might learn something."

The sentiments so expressed by the author must surely have echoed in the minds of countless children, in days not so very far removed, when school was school, play was play and the twain seldom met within the confines of schoolroom walls. How many of us, at times, when we were supposed to be 'paying attention' sat in a delicious daze travelling in our imaginations through the lands of make-believe, among the flowers, the trees, the birds, the creeks, the lakes, or it may be, in imaginary regions of heroic achievements. Then suddenly our castles in the air would be shattered by the totally unexpected swish from "Mister Ruler", the "tawse" (leather strap), or the plain old-fashioned hickory stick.

Editor's note – the hickory stick was part of the way teachers maintained order in classrooms during earlier decades. Hickory wood is strong, light and does not break easily.

Of course, corporal punishment in schools has well-nigh disappeared. The 'tune of the hickory stick' has today given way to the melodious outpourings of musical nursery rhyme and children's folksongs from the radio or phonograph, and embracing programs similar to the CBC's presentation, "Kindergarten of the Air".

The little red schoolhouses, which are part of Canada's tradition, are slowly disappearing in this age of fast travel, wiping out of distances, centralization and modern demands by education authorities for high practical standards in school architecture. One cannot stem the march of progress any more than King Canute could stem the ocean tides. But there can be no denying of the fact that these older country

and village schools played a most important part in the shaping of the Dominion. It is safe to say that the little red schoolhouses of Canada have, proportionately speaking, given Canada more statesmen, more outstanding clergymen, medical men, scientists, and engineers than have the schools of the larger cities since Confederation.

After all, the 'tune of the hickory stick' was by no means the only song heard in the rural schools of yesterday. There was the melodious jumble of bird songs to be listened to in spring and summer – robins, larks, crows, blackbirds, sparrows and all the rest. Pupils learned more than the three R's. They imbibed a knowledge of natural history, and a love of nature denied to those unfortunate children who sweltered in the warm months in an atmosphere suggestive of sulphur and brimstone, and who had to travel to the city (sic) to see what a fox, a skunk, or a groundhog, looked like, and never saw a cow or a pig, except as carcasses hung up in some butcher's shop.

It is a strange truth that the school children of earlier generations were, in the eyes of the righteous, "going to the dogs" just as rapidly as many consider they are going today. Even the judicious (and timely) applications to any healthy boy or girl. However, only a very small proportion of boys and girls ever really "go to the dogs" in any generation.

It is an undeniable fact that very few students were chastised with the hickory stick without just cause, and after all the odd chastisement probably did us all a certain measure of good.

A certain well-known and distinguished clergyman who gained his early education in a little red Canadian schoolhouse, once informed the writer that the worst hiding he ever got was when he, and some companions, climbed up on the school roof, deposited a large piece of sod over the chimney, and thus managed to have school dismissed in the middle of the forenoon before the teacher found out what was wrong. At that time, a teacher could inflict corporal punishment without any qualms about being hauled up before the Board of Education on the complaints of parents. In fact, earlier parents, in many cases, on hearing that their offspring had been punished in school, showed a deep and understanding sympathy with the teacher instead of the pupil, and the pupil generally got another taste of corporal punishment when he arrived home.

A well known Queen's Counsellor, a Member of Parliament, once confessed that he entered school during recess, smashed the hickory stick, threw it in the stove, and then added insult to injury by placing no fewer than three full-grown snakes in the teacher's desk in lieu of the hickory stick. The lady teacher, the eminent legal practitioner related, on discovering what had transpired, and also who had committed the crimes, immediately went outside, cut a new stick from a nearby birch tree, and the birch, as any boy educated in the little red schoolhouse will tell you, hurts far more than any hickory stick.

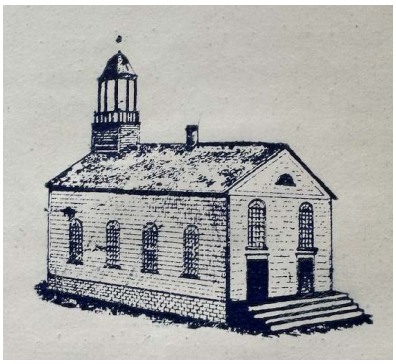
If we dared to call the hickory stick tune, then whose fault was it but our own if the 'piper' in the form of the teacher, supplied the very necessary music.

By Allan Reid/Prescott Journal
David Graham, contributor

The Establishment of Schools and Colleges in Ontario, 1792-1910, Vol. 1 by George Hodgins, L.S.O., M.A., LLD, F.R.G.S. 1910

The Public and Grammar Schools of Prescott

The first Public School was established in Prescott about the year 1855. Previous to this, Private Schools were in operation. Amongst the Teachers of these Schools were the Misses H. Gunn and Foster, and Mrs. Spiller, all of whom were efficient and highly educated ladies and Specialists in English and the accomplishments usually taught in Ladies' Boarding Schools.

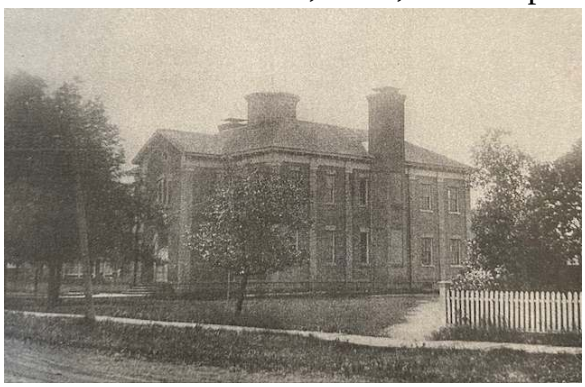


The first Presbyterian Church was later used as the first school from 1855 to 1867.

The first Grammar School House (formerly the Presbyterian Church) had a staff of four Teachers, Mr. Barr being Principal. He was followed by Messieurs MacLennan, Berch and Murray, as Principals, the latter being now the present Editor of the Montreal Standard.

In those days Oratory was made a specialty, and all Languages were included in the subjects taught.

In 1867, a new and more commodious Building was erected with a Staff of seven Teachers, called the Public Academy, with Mr. Moses McPherson, M.A., as Principal.



Prescott Public School or Prescott Academy was built in 1867 and served the community until it was demolished in 1951. It was immediately replaced by the new Central Public School.

He was followed by Mr. Sargeant, and the Reverend George Blair (who afterwards became Public School Inspector for Grenville County), and Mr. R.W. Hicks, Doctor Atkinson, Messieurs J. H. Redditt and C. Macpherson. Mr. Macperson was the first Principal of the Model School, then established in connection with the Public School, and he continued until his retirement from the teaching profession.

He was succeeded as Principal by Messieurs A. A. Jordan, H. W. Kerfoot, W. W. Thompson, C. Ramsay, and the present Principal, Mr. G. E. Scott, who, with an excellent Staff of Teachers, all Normal School Graduates, have brought the School to a high state of efficiency.

In 1879 (sic), the first High School was established on Henry Street, with Mr. M. McPherson as Principal, - he having resigned from the Public School Staff.

This building was erected on Henry Street as Prescott's Town Hall in 1851 and continued until 1875, then served as Prescott's High School from 1875 to 1894. The building still exists today as the Prescott Legion.

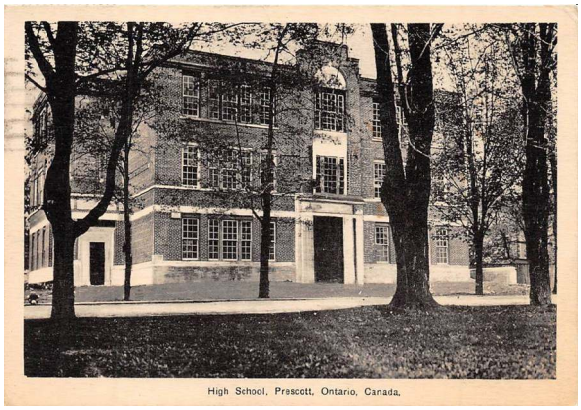
In a few years the accommodation afforded by this Building became inadequate, and it was decided to erect a new and "up to date" Building on Dibble Street, which was done in 1902 (sic).

Prescott High School 1894 - 1930 on Dibble Street. In 1924 and again in 1929 Davis Hall, the former Methodist Church across from the High School, was rented to be used as a gymnasium for the students. The building was owned by Fred and Mary Elliot Davis at this time.

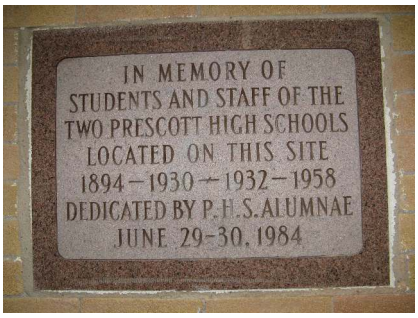
Previous to this date, Mr. Peter Byrne (afterwards Government Immigration Agent at London, England) was connected with the Teaching Staff.

Mr. McPherson was succeeded by Mr. R. C. Ross, B. A., as Principal of the new High School, and continued in that capacity for about five years. He was succeeded by the present Principal, Mr. H. W. Kerfoot, B. A. With an excellent staff of Teachers, including one male and two female Assistants, the School is in a high state of efficiency, the attendance last year being the largest in its history. The Building is equipped with the latest Heating and Water Systems, and the entire Upper Floor consists of an Assembly Room, with Seats, a Piano and all the necessary equipment and appurtenances.

F.J. Davy, *Secretary*. Prescott,
March 7th, 1910.



The old high school was demolished to construct a more modern building on the site with the Formal Opening of the new Prescott High School held September 1, 1931 and it continued until 1958. School was held in the Dominion Lighthouse Depot building from 1929 to 1931.



Ed. note: GCHS have excerpts from the Prescott School Board "The Record Book

of Trustees" in our collection as well as many newspaper articles about the schools. Some of the dates from The Record Book disagree with the ones in the report above. Photos and captions are editor's additions.

Three Murders in Area

Prescott Journal 13 Jan. 1882
The Ogdensburg Advance puts in print a story about a young man who formerly resided here, which has been in circulation over a month. We investigated it at the time, and followed one clue after another but each one ended in nothing. We give the story as we find it. It is pretty hard to say how it ever got started, as we could find no one who had ever seen the account of the hanging in print:

A curious story has obtained circulation in Ogdensburg and Prescott about one Jack McFall, who several years ago, lived in that vicinity. It is said that McFall was arrested and convicted of murder in Texas, and while under sentence of death admitted to have committed three murders in around Prescott, Ont. The first was that of a woman named Rogers, whom he claimed to have drowned. Another was a drover, who was thrown from a train on the Grand Trunk between Ogdensburg and Maitland and murdered and robbed, and another was the murder of an Indian, near the windmill lighthouse, below Prescott. Certain it is that about a dozen years ago this woman was found drowned and a coroner's jury brought in a verdict of suicide. The murder of the drover and Indian are also factual. McFall was arrested in connection with the Indian's murder, but was afterwards discharged.

Blue Church Cemetery

On March 16th and 17th there was a severe windstorm in our area and unfortunately one of the large old pines in the Blue Church Cemetery did come down. Most of the tombstones survived intact, but Daniel McKenzie's tombstone did not; you will hear more about that in the next newsletter. The area hit was in the southwest section of the cemetery just north of County Road 2. Some men were busy cutting up the tree and cleaning up the debris on April 6th.

Membership

Annual Membership: $20.00
Life Membership: $200

You may etransfer funds to gchs@truespeed.ca or make checks payable to Grenville County Historical Society Inc. and forward them to:

Lynne Chagnon,
Membership Chair,
GCHS,
500 Railway Ave., Box 982
Prescott, ON
K0E 1T0

Editor: Bonnie Gaylord